

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1275

INFO AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMCONSUL LOURENCO MARQUES

AMCONSUL LUANDA

AMCONSUL PONTA DELGADA

AMCONSUL OPORTO

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SUBJ: PRESIDENT COSTA GOMES AND VITOR ALVES ANNOUNCE
OPPOSITION TO AFM PARTICIPATION IN CONSTITUENT
ASSEMBLY WORK

REF: LISBON 4830

1. IN LISBON INTERVIEW WITH LE MONDE SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT IN
PORTUGAL, MARCEL NIDERGANG, WHICH PUBLISHED IN TODAY'S MORNING
PAPERS, PRESIDENT COSTA GOMES SAID HE "PERSONALLY HOSTILE" TO
AFM PARTICIPATION IN CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY. "I AM AGAINST THAT
IDEA BECAUSE IT WOULD IMPLY A PARTISAN POLITICAL STANCE ON
PARTY OF MILITARY. I AM PROFOUNDLY LIBERAL. I AM A DEMOCRAT.
AS SUCH, I FOLLOW MAJORITY DECISION WITHOUT HESITATION. BUT
IF A VOTE WERE TAKEN ON THIS QUESTION. I WOULD VOTE "NO", SINCE
I BELIEVE THAT AFM CAN BEST FULFILL ITS MISSION BY REMAINING
APART FROM PARTISAN POLITICAL STRUGGLES." SIMILAR VIEW EXPRESSED
BY AFM LEADER VICTOR ALVES TO CORRESPONDENT OF BRAZILIAN
PAPER O GLOBO DAY BEFORE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT, SAYING THAT
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AFTER ASSEMBLY FINISHES ITS WORK AND NEW PRESIDENT ELECTED AFM

WILL RETIRE AS ORIGINALLY PLANNED TO THEIR BARRACKS ALTHOUGH THEY WILL REMAIN VIGILANT TO ENSURE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS RESPECTED. ALVES POINTED OUT THAT DECISION TO TURN POWER OVER TO CIVILIANS WAS FIRST DECISION ADOPTED BY MILITARY AFTER APRIL 25, THEREBY EMPHASIZING IMPORTANCE ATTACHED BY THOSE WHO MADE REVOLUTION TO THIS IDEA.

2. REGARDING A POSSIBLE DELAY IN HOLDING OF CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY ELECTION, PRESIDENT SAID GOP WILL DO ALL POSSIBLE TO RESPECT AFM TIMETABLE. DELAY OF FEW DAYS OR WEEKS IN ORIGINAL DEADLINE OF MARCH 31 WOULD BE TOLERABLE, HE NOTED, BUT IDEAL IS TO RESPECT RIGOROUSLY THE PROGRAM.

3. COMMENT: THIS IS FIRST TIME PRESIDENT HAS SPOKEN OUT PUBLICLY ON QUESTION OF AFM PARTICIPATION IN WORK OF CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY. BOTH MDP AND COMMUNIST PARTY LEADERS HAVE BEEN WAGING PRESS CAMPAIGN IN FAVOR OF DIRECT AFM PARTICIPATION IN ASSEMBLY, AGAINST OPPOSITION OF PPD AND SOCIALISTS. IT THEREFORE SIGNIFICANT THAT PRESIDENT AND ALVES HAVE GONE ON RECORDS AGAINST IDEA, WHICH SUPPORTED BY SOME IN AFM POLITICAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE (SEE REFTEL. SO FAR NEITHER PRIME MINISTER OR MELO ANTUNES HAVE TAKEN A PUBLIC STAND ON ISSUE, BUT THEIR CONTINUED SILENCE IN FACE OF STATEMENTS BY PRESIDENT AND ALVES MAY WELL INDICATE THAT THEY HOLD VIEW THAT AFM SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN ASSEMBLY'S WORK. BOTH ARE CLOSE TO MDP ON MANY ISSUES, PERHAPS THIS ONE AS WELL. PRESIDENT IN PAST HAS CHARACTERISTICALLY WAITED UNTIL CRITICAL MOMENT TO CAST HIS VOTE ON IMPORTANT ISSUES, AND HE HAS SHOWN A REMARKABLE PROPENSITY TO COME OUT ON WINNING SIDE. WE INCLINED TO BELIEVE HIS STATEMENT NOW (WHICH FOLLOWS DISCUSSION THIS TOPIC AT AFM ASSEMBLY LAST WEEK) WILL RESULT, OR HAS ALREADY RESULTED IN, SHELIVING OF DIRECT AFM PARTICIPATION IN ASSEMBLY. THERE ARE OTHER WAYS AFM CAN INFLUENCE PRODUCT OF CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY, HOWEVER, SUCH AS BY PRESENTING ITS OWN DRAFT CONSTITUTION FOR CONSIDERATION BY ASSEMBLY, OR (LESS LIKELY) BY DECLARING THAT CONSTITUTION MUST BE APPROVED BY COUNCIL OF STATE WHERE AFM IN MAJORITY.

4. PRESIDENT'S REMARKS THAT MARCH 31 DEADLINE FOR ELECTIONS CAN BE EXTENDED FOR SHORT PERIOD ONLY MAY REFLECT FACT THAT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MORE TIME NEEDED FOR TECHNICAL REASONS TO REGISTER VOTERS AND GET ELECTORAL MACHINERY FUNCTIONING. ONE POSSIBLE DATE MENTIONED FOR ELECTION, IF ORIGINAL MARCH DEADLINE CANNOT BE MET, IS APRIL 25, WHICH IN ADDITION TO BEING PERMITTED BY PROGRAM (WHICH STATES THAT ELECTIONS ARE TO BE HELD WITHIN ONE YEAR OF DATE OF COUP), HAS A CERTAIN SYMBOLIC ATTRACTION FOR MILITARY.
SCOTT

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